

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8498

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR, EWWT, US, PN

SUBJECT: FAA BRIEFING ON PLANNED DECOMMISSIONING
OF REDUNDANT FAA RADAR ON SEMAPHORE HILL -
AUGUST 16, 1978, FAA, BALBOA, C.Z.

1. AT THE EMBASSY'S SUGGESTION, FAA HELD A SPECIAL
BRIEFING FOR GOP OFFICIALS ON THE PLANNED
DECOMMISSIONING OF THE FAA'S SEMAPHORE HILL RADAR,
LOCATED A FEW MILES FROM THE PACIFIC ENTRANCE TO THE
CANAL. THE PURPOSE WAS TO EXPLAIN TO GOP OFFICIALS
THE REASONS FOR THE PLANNED ACTION SO AS TO AVOID
ANOTHER UNWARRANTED GOP CLAIM THAT THE U.S. WAS
"DISMANTLING THE CANAL ZONE."

2. INVITATIONS FROM THE AMBASSADOR WERE SENT TO THE
FOLLOWING GOP OFFICIALS: MR. FABREGA, CHIEF GOP TREATY
COORDINATOR; MR. ABAD, DIRECTOR OF CIVIL AVIATION; AND
MAJOR PURCELL, AIR FORCE CHIEF. ATTENDING FROM THE
GOP WERE MR. ABAD; MR. HURTADO, CHIEF OF AIR TRAFFIC
CONTROL; MR. LIU, REPRESENTING MR. FABREGA; LIEUTENANT
PITTY, AIR FORCE. THE EMBASSY AND SOUTHCOM WERE ALSO
REPRESENTED. MR. WATSON AND MR. LARSON, FAA AREA
MANAGER, CONDUCTED THE BRIEFING.

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3. THE MAIN POINTS WERE AS FOLLOWS; A) THE SEMAPHORE
LONG RANGE (TWO HUNDRED MILE) RADAR WAS INSTALLED IN
1964 TO MEET A SPECIFIC U. S. AIR FORCE REQUIREMENT,
FOR WHICH THIS INSTALLATION IS NO LONGER NEEDED. B)
THE PRESENT PERICO ISLAND (AMODOR CAUSEWAY) INSTALLATION
WITH A SIXTY MILE RANGE IS TO BE UPGRADED PRIOR TO
SEMAPHORE DECOMMISSIONING TO PROVIDE THE SAME TWO

HUNDRED MILE RANGE THAT SEMAPHORE NOW COVERS. THERE WILL BE ONLY A ONE TO FIVE PERCENT DEGRADATION IN SERVICE SINCE ONLY THIS ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF AIRCRAFT NOW SERVED BY THE PRIMARY-TYPE RADAR SYSTEM AT SEMAPHORE ARE NOT EQUIPPED FOR THE SECONDARY-TYPE RADAR SYSTEM USED AT PERICO. C) THE OPERATING COST SAVINGS FROM THE PLANNED CHANGE IS ESTIMATED AT DOLLARS THREE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY FIVE THOUSAND ANNUALLY. D) THE SEMAPHORE SYSTEM WILL BE OBSOLETE IN A FEW YEARS, AND MAINTENANCE IS BOUND TO BECOME MORE DIFFICULT AND COSTLY OVER TIME. E) THE CHANGES WILL THEREFORE BE HIGHLY ADVANTAGEOUS TO THE GOP, AS FUTURE OPERATOR OF FAA'S PRESENT FACILITIES IN PANAMA

4. NO SIGNIFICANT QUESTIONS WERE ASKED BY ATTENDEES; THE DESIRABILITY OF THE CHANGE WAS NOT QUESTIONED IN ANY SENSE. MR. ABAD SUPPORTED THE FAA POSITION AND FELT THAT THE GOP HAD NO CAUSE TO OBJECT TO THIS DECOMMISSIONING, AND WOULD CONVEY HIS OPINION TO PRESIDENT LAKAS. HE WOULD INVITE PRESIDENT LAKAS TO ACCOMPANY HIM ON A VISIT TO THE FAA HEADQUARTERS IN BALBOA AT AN EARLY DATE.

5. FOLLOWING THE FORMAL BRIEFING, ATTENDEES WERE SHOWN THE OPERATIONS CONTROL AREA AND THE EQUIPMENT INSTALLATIONS IN THE BASEMENT, AND THE WORKINGS OF EACH WERE EXPLAINED.
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6. BEFORE DEPARTING, MR. ABAD MADE A COURTESY CALL ON MR. SWATEK, FAA REGIONAL DIRECTOR WHO WAS HERE FROM ATLANTA TO ATTEND THE N-W TOCUMEN AIRPORT DEDICATION.

7. FAA INTENDS TO PROCEED WITH SEMAPHORE DECOMMISSIONING AS SCHEDULED.

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